

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 3, 2010
TO: Policy Committee
FROM: W. Scott Whyte, Senior Landscape Planner
SUBJECT: Development Standards – Landscaping/Streetscape Policy

I. Streetscape Policy

As part of the overall review of development standards in the County, staff reviewed a variety of landscaping issues, one being the Streetscape Policy. The County's Streetscape Policy was approved by the Board of Supervisors in 1999 and amended in 2004. There are two main goals of the policy:

- To preserve or establish tree canopies along residential streets.
- To achieve 20% canopy over residential streets within 20 years.

There are five guidelines for street trees:

- Trees and shrubs are to be located within a 5' landscape preservation easement.
- The easement shall contain one tree for every 40' on average or one shrub for every 20' on average.
- Trees and/or Shrubs shall be spaced no greater than 75' along 60% of the street frontage
- Trees and shrubs shall be native. All trees shall be at least an inch and a half caliper.
- Existing trees that are within 20' of the right of way may be used.

After reviewing the policy's provisions and history of administration, staff proposes amending the policy in a variety of ways to address spacing of trees from the right of way, making it a more effective policy overall.

II. Discussion Items

A. Spacing of trees from right of way

1. Description of issue/problem

- *The Streetscape Policy has been applied to legislative cases since 1999. A problem associated with the policy has been when the street trees have been proposed at such a distance from the road that they no longer are directly adjacent to the street and become more of a front yard tree than a street tree. The Goal of the Streetscape Policy is to preserve and/or establish a tree canopy along residential roads. Placing trees too far from the road is detrimental to meeting this goal.*

2. History

- *The Policy was first proposed as a result of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan's recommendation.*
- *The County's original Streetscape Policy was based upon York's County's model and was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1999. It was drafted as a trial policy and was intended to be amended as needed in the future.*
- *In 2004 the policy was amended and the following provisions were added:*

- *Expanded acceptable plants to include natives and other tree species that are commonly grown in this area.*
 - *Every effort to avoid conflicts the landscape easement and utilities shall be made during the design phase of the project*
 - *Allowed 22" shrubs spaced at 20'.*
 - *Required plantings to occur between November 1st and March 31st.*
3. Comprehensive Plan GSAs, other documents, public input, and PC and BOS directives
- *Community Appearance Guide addresses the use of street trees as a design feature.*
 - *New Town Design Guidelines address street trees and how they are used in conjunction with other design features.*
 - *The Toano Area Study recommended the use of street trees along Route 60 and to break up parking areas.*
 - *No specific public input or PC and BOS direction was provided regarding this subject.*
4. Solutions and policy options
- *One option would be to require a streetscape package for all subdivisions similar to what York County requires in its subdivision ordinance. York County requires street trees in all subdivisions and they are required to be within the VDOT right-of-way or within a 10' zone adjacent to the right of way. Changing the policy to an ordinance would increase overall costs to developers by requiring streetscape packages for all major subdivisions, not just legislative cases, and is not part of staff's proposal.*
 - *Staff does recommend amending the current Streetscape Policy to include a clause that prescribes by percentage, the distance a street tree can be planted from the right of way. This would ensure that the trees can be recognized as street trees and accomplish the goals of the policy. Requiring that trees be located no more than a certain percentage of the distance from the right of way to the building envelope would give the designers some flexibility to coordinate the street tree easement with utility easements. Using a percentage would also ensure that the tree placement is proportional to the different distances from building envelope to right of way found at different subdivisions.*
 - *In addition, staff recommends adding a clause that ensures that the applicant will work with all applicable agencies to create a design that coordinates the streetscape with planned utilities.*
5. Staff recommendations
- *Staff recommends that the Policy Committee support amending the Streetscape Policy to include a clause that prescribes the distance a street tree can be planted from the right of way by a percentage, and a clause that ensures that the applicant will work with all applicable agencies to create a design that coordinates the streetscape with planned utilities. The overall intent of the change would be to simply ensure that street trees are planted a reasonable distance from the road so they resemble street trees rather than front yard trees.*

III. Conclusion

Staff recommends that the Policy Committee support staff's proposal to amend the County Streetscape Policy to better address spacing of trees from the VDOT right of way and to improve its overall effectiveness.

Attachments:

1. James City County Streetscape Policy